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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 001782

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/12/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR VISIT OF IRAQI FOREIGN MINISTER  
ZEBARI

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Patricia A. Butenis. Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (S) Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari arrives in Washington at a critical juncture. SOFA negotiations have become a domestic political flashpoint and the fodder for political agendas, a vehicle for Iranian machinations, and the crux of a false choice between sovereignty and security. Zebari's Washington meetings immediately follow his participation in the June 13 UNSC 1790 mid-term review. While in full agreement that a successful conclusion of a SOFA is in both U.S. and Iraqi interests, Zebari is also acutely aware of the treacherous political waters that must be traversed to make that happen.

¶2. (S) Zebari's visit also comes at a possible tipping point in our efforts to encourage Arab countries to engage Iraq and serve as a counterweight to Iranian influence. The June 5 visit to Baghdad of UAE FM Abdullah bin Zayed and his public announcement that the UAE would reopen an Embassy in the coming weeks, coupled with the June 12 visit to Amman of PM Maliki offer the most dramatic evidence of this. Zebari's role in this diplomatic push has been crucial. His continued attention to both the high politics and the ground-level concerns of Arab governments as they consider reopening embassies and sending Ambassadors to Baghdad will be critical to success.

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SOFA  
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¶3. (S) FM Zebari has been a helpful force within the GOI as the SOFA discussions have proceeded. He has sought to underline the necessity of concluding a SOFA to his cabinet colleagues and to key CoR members. In recent meetings with S/I Satterfield, Zebari has stressed the need to both counter the inflammatory disinformation campaign orchestrated by Iran, Hizbollah, Moqtada al-Sadr and other SOFA opponents, and at the same time to do so with care. He should be commended for his continued efforts to steer the GOI's internal debate on SOFA issues in the right direction.

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Neighbors Engagement: Real Movement, But MFA Must Do More  
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¶4. (S) The first half of June has seen a flurry of positive developments. UAE FM Abdullah bin Zayed's (ABZ) June 5 visit went very well. Zebari accompanied ABZ on all his meetings,

rode with him throughout the day, and held a joint press conference in which ABZ announced that the UAE would reopen its Embassy and send an Ambassador (according to Zebari's information from ABZ, the current UAE Ambassador to India), in the coming weeks. At the same time, a diplomatic dance between Amman and Baghdad resulted in King Abdullah inviting PM Maliki to Amman (a visit that took place June 12) and a set of discussions in Amman between senior GOJ officials and an Embassy Baghdad delegation to address specific Jordanian concerns on the location, safety and protection of its proposed new Embassy site and personnel. Bahrain also announced publicly that it would reopen an Embassy in Baghdad, and S/I Satterfield and PolCouns traveled to Kuwait to discuss the specific modalities of reopening a Kuwaiti embassy here as well.

15. (S) This is all good news and Zebari should be congratulated for the key role he has played. At the same time, however, discussions this week with UNAMI on the Neighbors process revealed growing frustration that the MFA has not taken the steps promised to stand up a Support Mechanism needed to organize a successful and sustainable Neighbors Process -- in particular the planning necessary for the next Neighbors Conference to be held in Baghdad in the fall. Zebari should be urged to energize the MFA to get the support mechanism up and running and to work closely with UNAMI on preparations for the next Neighbors Conference.

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Turkey/PKK  
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16. (S) The Turks and Iraqis continue to engage on bilateral issues and PKK. Turkish Special Envoy on Iraq Murat Ozcelik

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was in Baghdad this past week mainly to push Ankara's concept for dividing the Kirkuk provincial council along a 32-32-32-4 Kurd-Sunni-Turkmen-minorities power-sharing arrangement, which the Kurds resolutely oppose. Ozcelik hopes to turn around Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) President Massoud Barzani on this, although they don't have a meeting set yet -- perhaps the end of June, if Barzani comes to Baghdad. A very positive step forward for increasing and improving bilateral relations is the upcoming visit of Turkish PM Erdogan to Baghdad. The trip is expected to take place the second week of July.

17. (S) On counter-PKK cooperation, the KRG continues to be moderately successful in blocking passage to PKK areas in the far north. More concretely, they passed to the Turkish General Staff information regarding a PKK media center in the north, which was subsequently destroyed in a Turkish aerial strike. This cooperation has helped to allay GOT concerns that the KRG is unwilling to take steps against the PKK. The KRG also turned back at Irbil and Suleimaniyah airports suspected PKK members from Europe. We should tell Zebari that increased GOI/KRG cooperation is very welcome and more steps against the PKK would also be welcome. This forward movement could increase the GOT's ability to take further political steps, as they did in southeast Turkey recently with the announcement of an investment package to improve the socio-economic situation in this Kurdish region.

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Biographical Note  
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18. (S/NF) Zebari is a disarming, amiable and astute diplomat/politician with extensive and constructive experience dealing with the U.S. Born in 1952 in Mosul, he is Massoud Barzani's uncle (although 10 years Barzani's junior), one of Barzani's key confidants, and a member of the Kurdish Democratic Party's (KDP) Politburo for nearly two decades. That said, he regards himself as an Iraqi and is assiduous to avoid giving the impression that he represents

only the Kurds.

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Suggested Talking Points  
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SOFA

- We very much appreciate the very constructive role you have taken within GOI circles as the SOFA discussion has proceeded.
- As you know, we have reached a decision point on this issue.
- We look forward to the GOI's official response to the proposals and options we have put forward.
- We know your continued efforts will be critical to moving us toward our mutual goal of concluding negotiations by the end of July.

Neighbors Engagement

- Developments in recent days are very encouraging.
- We understand UAE FM Abdullah bin Zayid's visit went very well and the UAE is moving ahead with concrete steps to reopen an Embassy and send an Ambassador.
- That visit, coupled with PM Maliki's visit to Jordan, recent Jordanian-U.S. discussions to address specific concerns regarding the safety and protection of their Embassy and diplomats, and Bahrain's announcement that it too would soon reopen an Embassy, this represents real movement in the right direction.
- We fully support your efforts and our Embassy team in Baghdad stands ready to assist you any way we can.
- On the Neighbors Process, we urge you to energize the Support Mechanism at the MFA and ensure it works closely with UNAMI on planning for an autumn Neighbors Conference in Baghdad.

Turkey/PKK

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- We are heartened by the increased degree of GOI/KRG cooperation on the PKK issue.
  - More steps along the lines we have seen recently would be very welcome.
  - Such steps could increase the GOT's ability to take political steps, such as they recently did in southeastern Turkey with the announcement of an investment package to improve the socio-economic situation in this Kurdish region.
- BUTENIS